

Sacraments start in a child's home

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article is the sixth in a series on raising your children in the faith.

Catholics may celebrate the sacraments in church, but learning about them starts in the home, according to Mike Drexler, faith-formation coordinator and youth minister at St. Agnes Parish in Avon.

In order to teach their children the importance of the Eucharist, for example, parents must invite Christ into the family's daily life.

"The Eucharist is certainly the focal point for Catholics, but I try to get people to get looking beyond that one day, before and after," he said.

One way to inspire a sense of the sacred outside Mass is to encourage children to regularly pray for their friends and family members, he said.

The home is also where the seeds of individual sacraments are planted, according to Sister of St. Joseph Karen Dietz, the Diocese of Rochester's coordinator of sacramental catechesis. For example, to understand the Mass, Sister Dietz said parents can liken it to several events that take place in the home. The Liturgy of the Word is akin to the sharing of family stories, she said, whereas the eucharistic prayer is a prayer of thanksgiving much like grace before a meal. And, of course, receiving the Eucharist is like participating in a family meal.

"If we could explain to a family that this is a good way to understand

Parenting

the Mass, then those symbols are going to mean a lot more to children and adults," Sister Dietz said.

When preparing for first Communion, children are naturally curious about the church's belief in the presence of Christ in the bread and wine, Drexler and Sister Dietz noted. When it comes to teaching about the presence of Jesus in the bread and wine, don't "over explain," Sister Dietz said.

"Most of our kids are more comfortable with mystery," she said. On that note, Drexler said: "It's hard for adults to understand that. It's part of the mystery for us."

Drexler added that parents can simply say that although the consecrated bread and wine look and taste the same as they did before they were blessed, Catholics believe that once they are consecrated, they are special and must be treated with reverence and respect. That includes holding the body of Christ in one's hands respectfully and acting properly when waiting in line for the Eucharist, he said.

When it comes to another sacrament for which children prepare, the sacrament of penance, it's important for children to see forgiveness modeled in the home before they ever-go to confession, Sister Dietz said.

"Has your child ever heard you say 'I'm sorry,' or 'I forgive you?'" Sister Dietz said. "If they haven't,



Bob Roller/CNS

Kelsey Hernandez, 8, receives her first Communion from Msgr. Paul Dudziak at Jesus the Good Shepherd Church in Dunkirk, Md., May 4. Catholics may celebrate sacraments in the church, but some experts believe that a child should begin learning about them in the home.

they're not going to know about forgiveness or God."

Sister Dietz said that when she teaches children about the sacrament of reconciliation, she emphasizes that "it's a gift from the church."

"It's the opportunity to talk face-to-face with the priest about whatever bothers them," she said.

It's also important to teach chil-

dren that sacraments like penance and the Eucharist point to the spirit in them, according to "The Reconciling Family," a booklet used by parish catechists and parents.

"Sacraments do what Jesus did," the booklet reads. "They put into effect the work he came to do. They heal a broken and sinful world and serve as signs that the kingdom of God is among his followers."

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